DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 517 CS 511 308

TITLE	Sharing Responsibility for Results: Breakthrough to Literacy [R].
INSTITUTION	McGraw-Hill Companies, New York, NY
PUB DATE	2002-05-00
NOTE	29p.; Published in cooperation with National Association of Elementary School Principals and National Alliance of Black School Educators.
AVAILABLE FROM	McGraw-Hill Education, The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, NY, NY 10020. Tel: 212-512-6512; Fax: 212-512-4769. For full text: http://www.mheducation.com.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Beginning Reading; Elementary Education; Faculty Development; *Language Skills; *Literacy; *Public Schools; *Reading Instruction; Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Breakthrough to Literacy Approach; East Chicago Public Schools IN; Norfolk City Schools VA

ABSTRACT

This report considers six schools in two urban districts that made deliberate commitments to improve student performance in early language and literacy--each story is different, yet they all share an important insight: that a school and a model provider can work together to help every child learn to read. As the stories in the report demonstrate, in schools that partner with "Breakthrough to Literacy," attributes for success flow naturally through the teaching and learning experience: Teachers expect more from students and become more focused; they measure the progress not just of classes, but of individual students; teachers, administrators, students, and parents work together to create effective early literacy environments in the classroom and at home; and students are happier and perform better in classrooms and on standardized and high-stakes tests, even two or three years after their "Breakthrough" experience. According to the report, "Breakthrough to Literacy" achieves results because it uses a research-based conceptual framework and curriculum that build on the way children learn language and reading skills; and it provides the intensive professional development that produces good teachers of early literacy as well as good readers. The six schools discussed in the report are: Carrie Gosch Elementary, Lincoln Elementary, and McKinley Elementary--all in East Chicago, Indiana--and Larrymore Elementary, Norview Elementary, and St. Helena Elementary--all in Norfolk, Virginia. Contains 14 suggested readings. (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 467 517

Results

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. K. Frank

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Sharing Responsibility for Results

Breakthrough to Literacy

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS 511 308

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table of Contents

Putting Research into Practice:
Building Effective Early Literacy Environments ____ 4

School City of East Chicago ____ 6

Carrie Gosch Elementary ____ 8

Lincoln Elementary ____ 10

McKinley Elementary ____ 12

Norfolk Public Schools ____ 14

Larrymore Elementary ____ 16

Norview Elementary ____ 18

St. Helena Elementary ____ 20

Breakthrough to Literacy:
From Research to Results ____ 22

References ____ 24

Rich, engaging literature inspires children to share the gift of story by reading aloud.

Dear Reader,

In this report, you will learn about six schools in two urban districts that made deliberate commitments to improve student performance in early language and literacy. Each story is different, yet they all share an important insight: that a school and a model provider can work together to help every child learn to read.

Educators have long understood that students from low-income families often begin school with significant needs that must be met if they are to be successful readers and learners. In his landmark 1979 article, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," (*Educational Leadership*, October, 1979), Ronald Edmonds identified a number of factors existing in schools that are able to bridge the gaps and create an environment for success. Among his correlates of high-achieving urban schools, Edmonds cited high expectations by teachers; available tools to monitor students' performance; leadership and support of principals; and trust among teachers, administrators and students.

More than a decade of experiments with school reform models have exposed the difficulty of grafting Edmonds' correlates onto under-performing schools. As the stories in this report will demonstrate, however, in schools that partner with Breakthrough to Literacy, these attributes for success flow naturally through the teaching and learning experience:

- Teachers expect more from students and become more focused; they measure the progress not just of classes, but of individual students.
- Teachers, administrators, students and parents work together to create effective early literacy environments in the classroom and at home.
- Students are happier and perform better in classrooms and on standardized and high-stakes tests, even two or three years after their *Breakthrough* experience.

Breakthrough to Literacy achieves results because it is a proven process that does two things extremely well:

- It uses a research-based conceptual framework and curriculum that build on the way children learn language and reading skills; and
- It provides the intensive professional development that produces good teachers of early literacy as well as good readers.

To accomplish these things, Breakthrough to Literacy forms a covenant with every school to work together to create the conditions for the implementation's success and to share accountability for its results. This is an unusual approach for a model provider.

If you would like to learn more about the experiences these schools are having with *Breakthrough to Literacy*, please contact any of the administrators identified in the articles that follow. They look forward to sharing with you both their challenges and successes.

Quentin Lawson
Executive Director
National Alliance of Black School Educators

Robert E. Evanson
President
McGraw-Hill Education

Vincent Ferandino
National Association of Elementary School Principals

NABSE

McGraw Hill Education

NAESP

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Putting Research into Practice:
Building Effective Early Literacy Environments

***Breakthrough* to *Literacy* provides teachers with the tools they need to engage each child with language and print so that he or she can become a successful reader.**

Carolyn Brown
and Jerry Zimmermann
Breakthrough to Literacy

Success in reading is a measurable outcome. Over the years, schools across the country have reported *Breakthrough to Literacy*'s success in enhancing the effectiveness of teachers, improving the performance of students and, consequently, increasing test scores.

Quantitative evidence of *Breakthrough*'s effectiveness has been demonstrated using every kind of assessment tool. This should not be surprising, because *Breakthrough*'s curriculum and its instructional and implementation models were developed through continuous assessment of *Breakthrough* classrooms.

While test results tell an important part of the story, there is, however, much more to say. To understand the full impact of *Breakthrough to Literacy*, we also need to appreciate its qualitative contributions to teaching and learning: how it supports and expands the role of teachers, how it motivates and rewards students, and how it helps create a culture of higher expectations for children and teachers.

In these pages, you will read first-person commentaries from central office administrators and elementary school principals in two districts where *Breakthrough* has been implemented for several years. Both Norfolk Public Schools and School City of East Chicago, Indiana, serve populations with significant challenges, including high percentages of families living in poverty and families that are homeless or transient. Despite these challenges, students in *Breakthrough* classrooms there have become successful and enthusiastic readers. With each narrative, you also will see test results that provide clear evidence of the students' and teachers' achievements.

Breakthrough to Literacy helps teachers engage children to explore and think...

Sustained Success

Breakthrough to Literacy is the product of almost two decades of research at the University of Iowa. First in the laboratory and then in the classroom, its developers refined the curriculum, the instructional practices, and the conceptual framework of language and literacy that became the *Breakthrough* process.

Designed for prekindergarten through second grade, *Breakthrough*'s comprehensive process provides teachers and administrators with the tools they need to successfully engage children with language and print. These tools include:

1. a practical and effective conceptual framework of language and literacy development that integrates curriculum, assessment, and instruction;
2. a comprehensive and systematic model of curriculum and instruction, "balanced" at the level of the child, that builds children's oral language, moves them comfortably to print, and builds their oral and written comprehension skills;
3. tools and materials that allow teachers and parents to engage each child in the language and literacy process;
4. a comprehensive software curriculum that provides children with critical language and literacy experiences;
5. ongoing assessment of each child on critical developmental parameters;
6. a commitment of at least two years of in-classroom support to help teachers build effective early language and literacy environments.

Unlike other reading programs that incorporate technology, *Breakthrough to Literacy* places the teacher at the heart of the learning process. Thanks to *Breakthrough's* extensive professional development, classroom teachers become highly effective literacy coaches who fully understand the principles of reading and language development.

By enabling teachers to focus on each child's needs, *Breakthrough to Literacy* has achieved successful results in a broad cross-section of student populations, particularly those children who come to school with significant developmental or environmental challenges. According to Dr. Marycarolyn France, Senior Coordinator of Planning and Evaluation, Department of Compensatory Education Programs for Norfolk Public Schools, *Breakthrough to Literacy* "levels the playing field" for students at risk of reading failure.

The success stories reported here – and similar results in thousands of other schools in 37 states – are testaments to the dedication and hard work of the administrators, teachers, and children who have partnered with Breakthrough to Literacy in these two districts. The importance of the word "partnerships" cannot be overstated. The success of any implementation depends directly on the establishment of a partnership between Breakthrough to Literacy and the schools. Through this partnership, the conditions for success are established.

Administrators and teachers at Norfolk Public Schools and School City of East Chicago have permitted us to share with them the responsibility for results in their classrooms. We are proud to be their partners and pleased to report on their achievements.

Carolyn Brown, Ph.D.
Founder
Breakthrough to Literacy

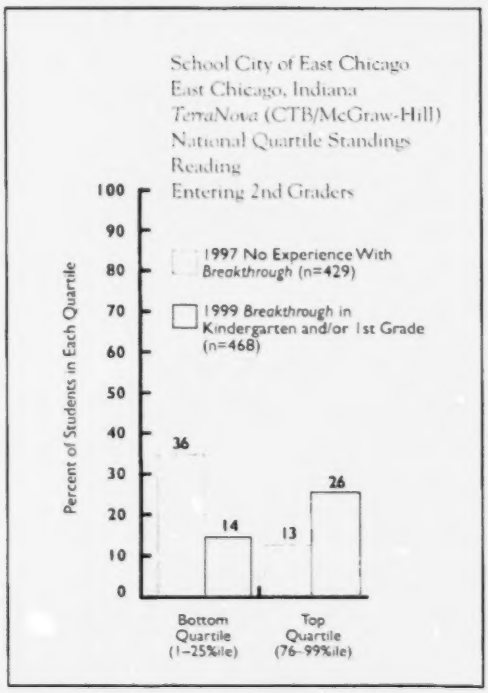
Jerry Zimmermann, Ph.D.
Co-Founder and President
Breakthrough to Literacy

...write, and read.

School City of East Chicago

"From the data the School City has gathered, it is clear that the *Breakthrough to Literacy* program is having both a long-term and short-term positive impact upon the achievement of the students of the School City of East Chicago."

Linda Nolan
Director of Instructional Services



"I've never seen a program that has a greater impact than *Breakthrough to Literacy*," says Linda Nolan. "In two words – it works!"

As Director of Instructional Services for School City of East Chicago, Indiana, Ms. Nolan is familiar with the challenges of providing quality learning opportunities in a disadvantaged urban school district. Once a thriving home to oil and steel refineries, today East Chicago has a mean annual household income of just $9,000 and the state's highest percentage of children living in poverty.

Many of those children arrive at school with vast deficits – social, emotional, and developmental – that further impede their learning. With unemployment high and the tax base eroded, Ms. Nolan struggles to find the resources – human, technological, and financial – needed to bring these students up to age- and grade level.

One subject she worries less about these days is reading. Beginning in 1998-99, School City of East Chicago began a relationship with Breakthrough to Literacy that Ms. Nolan describes as a "true partnership."

"With *Breakthrough*, we can provide our inner-city children with advantages that more affluent schools take for granted – knowledgeable teachers, individualized instruction, and a clear expectation of excellent results. Our district and teachers are active partners in achieving those results, sharing responsibility for creating the conditions under which they are achieved."

Starting from Scratch

When East Chicago's relationship with Breakthrough began, "our district was facing a significant challenge," recalls Ms. Nolan. "With just 17 percent of our tenth graders and 25 percent of our third, sixth, and eighth graders passing Indiana's high-stakes proficiency exam, ISTEP+, we knew we had to make system-wide changes to improve achievement.

"We targeted early literacy for urgent attention. We saw it as preventive medicine. By giving our youngest students a good foundation in reading and language, we would head off problems in later grades.

"But this was easier said than done. Most of our teachers, while dedicated and hard-working, were not literacy coaches. Many of my counterparts in urban school districts were turning to reading programs that essentially took teachers out of the process by using scripts and computer programs. It seemed to me, though, that these so-called 'teacher-proof solutions' were really counterintuitive. At-risk children need *more* instruction, not less."

Forming a Partnership

Ms. Nolan first heard about *Breakthrough to Literacy* from an independent instructional technology consultant. "He said that districts in Virginia and Texas were achieving dramatic and sustained results in kindergarten and first-grade reading classes.

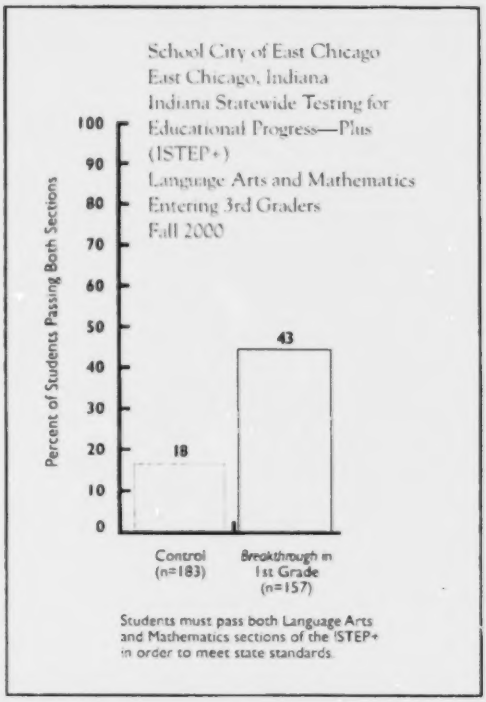
"I visited *Breakthrough* classrooms in Norfolk and saw for myself that the children took real joy in reading. Their teachers seemed to comprehend the developmental aspects of the reading process to a degree that I had rarely seen.

"Later, I met with Breakthrough's co-founder and president, Dr. Jerry Zimmermann. He said that, like some other reading programs popular with urban schools, *Breakthrough* uses computer software to customize instruction and chart progress. Unlike others, though, *Breakthrough*'s curriculum depends on teachers, who remain in control of the classroom and the learning process."

Breakthrough staff development professionals conducted all-day sessions that made East Chicago teachers skilled advocates for early literacy, recalls Ms. Nolan. "Breakthrough educated our teachers about the program and its conceptual framework, providing them with a thorough understanding of how children make the transition from spoken language to print. In addition, the company's literacy coaches worked with teachers in their classrooms, helping them link theory with practice.

"Teachers overwhelmingly found this process valuable. In evaluating the pilot program, all their responses were positive, and several wrote pages and pages of praise, describing 'breakthrough' moments when children exceeded their own expectations.

"Although our first-year pilot program ran only about five months, in May, the students in *Breakthrough* classrooms significantly outperformed the control group on the *TerraNova*, scoring 3 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs)* higher in reading and 2 NCEs higher in language."



Continuing Success

From a pilot implementation of 30 classrooms in 1998–99, East Chicago twice expanded its *Breakthrough* implementation, adding 23 classrooms in 1999–2000 and 13 in 2001–02. This year, East Chicago is a beta site for *Breakthrough*'s second-grade program, which is implemented in 12 classrooms.

The partnership is still working, says Ms. Nolan. "Students in *Breakthrough* classrooms continue to outperform those in the control groups each year on the *TerraNova*. In fall 2000, when the first group of *Breakthrough* students took our state-mandated proficiency exam at grade three, we saw how their initial success translated into long-term achievement. Of those who had *Breakthrough* in first grade, 43 met state standards, compared to just 18 percent of those who did not have access to *Breakthrough*.

"We know urban children have the ability to learn – the challenge is putting the pieces in place that will let them overcome all the things that are holding them back. When something like *Breakthrough to Literacy* comes along that has such an impact on their lives, I want everyone to know about it."

For more information
Linda Nolan
Director of Instructional Services
School City of East Chicago
210 East Columbus Drive
East Chicago, Indiana 46312
219-391-4100, Ext. 336
lnolan@ecps.org

Carrie Gosch Elementary

"Now that *Breakthrough* is fully implemented, we have higher expectations for what our children can do."
Linda Dix
Principal

A line of tiny kindergartners passes along a bright hallway in Carrie Gosch Elementary School, touching forefingers to their closed lips, reminding themselves how to behave. Inside a nearby classroom, three first graders enthusiastically read in unison through one *Breakthrough to Literacy* pupil book after another. "Can I read to you?" a boy in a red polo shirt shyly asks a visitor. Four children at computers are taking their turns in the *Breakthrough* programs "Explore Words" and "Listen to Stories." Others are reading their Take-Me-Home books or doing a science activity with their teacher. Their Book-of-the-Week is *City Senses*. This morning they are making a word web about the sense of smell.

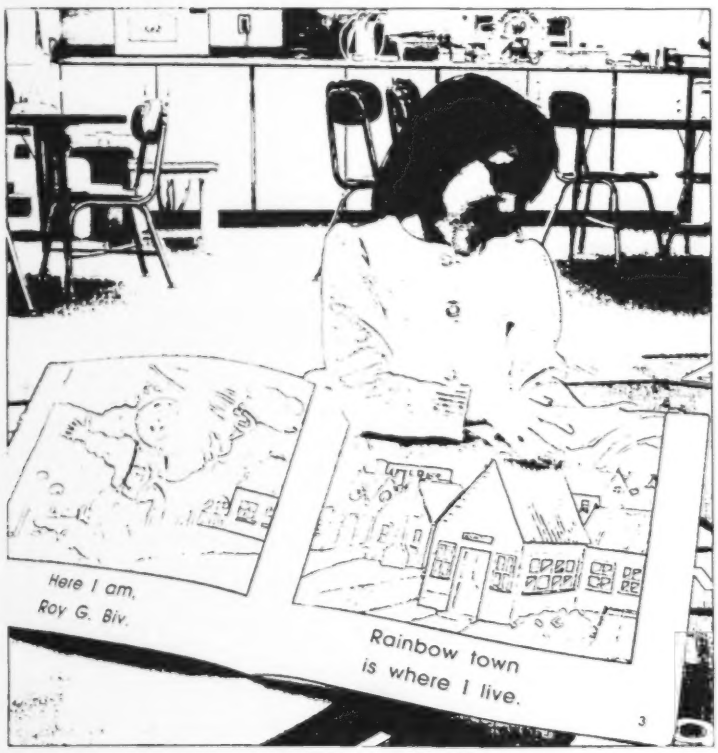
Catching Up

"About three-fourths of our children live in public housing," says Principal Linda Dix. "Many come from single-parent homes and have very young mothers whose education stopped when they were 14, 15, or 16 years old. There's not a lot of conversation in the children's homes, and our new kindergarten students score very low on receptive and expressive language. Most are two years behind when they begin school. One of our greatest challenges is to help them catch up.

"Prior to *Breakthrough to Literacy*, when children first came to kindergarten, our teachers did not have high expectations for them. This was especially true for our veteran teachers, who had watched, year after year, as the children arrived with severe developmental delays. At the end of kindergarten, our first-grade teachers did not expect any of their incoming students to be readers.

"We first implemented *Breakthrough* in two kindergarten classrooms five years ago. As those children moved to first grade, the other teachers said, 'The *Breakthrough* children are doing so much better than ours are!' In the following year, when we administered *TerraNova* standardized tests at the beginning and end of first grade, the *Breakthrough* children's scores were higher than their non-*Breakthrough* classmates.

"Now that *Breakthrough* is fully implemented in all of our kindergartens and first-grade classrooms – and we're beta testing in all of the second grades – we have higher expectations for what our children can do. Kindergarten teachers expect the children to end the year writing sentences and reading. And first-grade teachers expect incoming students to write and do some reading when they start school in the fall. That's real progress for us."



Even very young children quickly view themselves as readers.

Helping Parents

As in many disadvantaged districts, teachers at Carrie Gosch are continually challenged to help parents support their children's learning, says Ms. Dix.

"Many of our parents want their children to get a good education, but they don't understand their part in the process. So, at monthly parents' meetings, our

teachers explain some of what the children are doing in the *Breakthrough* program. They help parents understand the importance of the Take-Me-Home books and of spending 15 minutes each day listening to their child read and talking together about the stories.

"Through the *Home Connections* materials, our parents also are learning to give instructions at home, stopping to ask questions such as, 'What did I say to you? Tell me what I asked you to do.' They're learning critical parenting skills. They're learning that reading is important. The *Breakthrough* parent materials are parent-friendly, not difficult to read, so parents don't have to wonder, 'What do they mean by that?'

"Most parents in our community don't read newspapers, magazines, or books. Before the children started using *Breakthrough to Literacy* in school, parents didn't take their children to the library or introduce them to reading at all. Many parents said, 'My children don't know how to handle books; and if the books get torn, I can't afford to pay for them. So we just won't go to the library. Then I don't have to worry.'

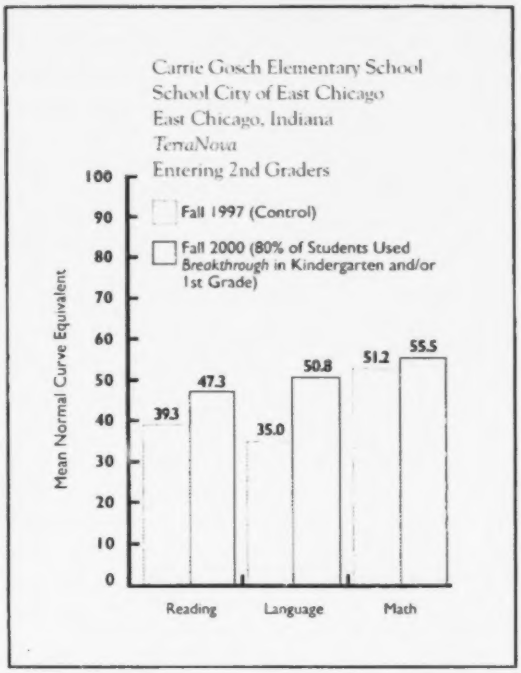
"Now, because the children have their own collections of Take-Me-Home books, they tend to value books more. They realize that books are not something they scribble in. Printed materials now have value for the parents, too. I see parents working with their children more to see that they're reading. They are taking their children to the library. And if the children borrow books from the library or the school, their parents make sure the books get returned.

"Most parents will tell you that what's vitally important for them is to be informed about their child's education. They want to know what's going on in the classroom. The *Breakthrough* reports give them that information. Teachers can now say, 'Look at this; this is where your child is. This is what your child can do.' Parents like having information that is not a teacher's guess, that's objective, not subjective."

Excited About Reading

With *Breakthrough*, children gain even more than a mastery of words and language, says Ms. Dix. "*Breakthrough* captures the children's interest in the reading process. It grabs them and gets them excited about books and stories. Once the children start reading stories on the *Breakthrough* software, they are thrilled to have a copy of the book that they can take home. When their parents ask them, 'What were you doing today?' sometimes the kids actually say, 'We didn't really do anything, we just had fun.'

"Yet, in reality, they were reading and working on phonics and other language skills, which is fun for them. *Breakthrough to Literacy* means a lot to our children. Since we started *Breakthrough*, I have never yet heard any child say, 'I don't want to go to the computer.' They're never reluctant. In fact, if the teacher forgets that it's their time or decides to do something else at that time, the children will remind them. 'This is my time. Please don't forget my time.'"



Carrie Gosch Elementary

Enrollment	458
Free/Reduced Lunches	94.4%
Demographics	
African American	87%
Hispanic	12%
Caucasian	<1%
Asian American	0%

For more information

Linda Dix
Principal
455 E. 148th Street
Carrie Gosch Elementary
East Chicago, Indiana 46312
219-391-4172
ldix@ecps.org

Lincoln Elementary

"*Breakthrough* has been instrumental in helping us improve our students' early literacy skills."

Nancy Sharp
Principal

"You have to listen to us read our books!" Three excited kindergartners flock around a visitor, waving pupil-sized copies of their Book-of-the-Week. Together they open to the first page and begin to read in unison, their high voices lilting with the rhythm of the story. No sooner do they finish this story than they choose another, and begin again.

These children have been using *Breakthrough to Literacy* for less than a month, but already they feel the power of printed words to convey a story.

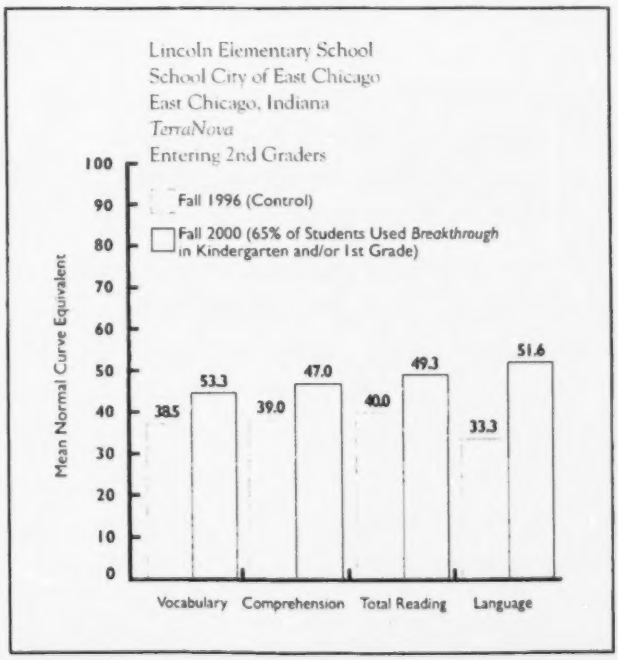
The Challenges of Poverty

"Our school families lack a lot of resources at home," says principal Nancy Sharp. "They don't have books. They don't get the newspaper. And many of our parents are single parents, who have the kinds of challenges that are often seen in low-income areas.

"Parental involvement at school is very limited. And many parents don't have vehicles, so some of our children never have the opportunity to leave the city. The result is that the children don't have the background knowledge they will need to put what they learn into a meaningful context.

"Many of our families are homeless, moving back and forth across the city, from relative to relative, throughout the year. Others move here from Texas or Mexico – and back again – sometimes missing a month of school at a time."

"Before they start kindergarten, we give our children the *Early Prevention of School Failure* test. Year after year, most of the incoming kindergartners score at least two years behind in their prereading skills. So we're already playing a catch-up game the day they walk in the door."



Building Vocabulary and Confidence

Ms. Sharp understands that early intervention is critical for success. "We know we have to catch the children at the very beginning – at kindergarten and first grade. Before *Breakthrough to Literacy*, we were having such a hard time getting our students ready for first grade. *Breakthrough* has been instrumental in helping us teach reading and improve our students' early literacy skills.

"I like how *Breakthrough* teaches reading in progression from the very beginning. It teaches how to go from left to right and top to bottom. It teaches that sentences are made of separate words. And *Breakthrough* really helps to increase children's vocabulary. We especially notice the difference with our special education and LEP [limited-English proficient] students."

One of the benefits of *Breakthrough* is that it makes children want to read, says Ms. Sharp. "Motivation is a big part of learning, and when you can motivate kids to read, that's half the battle. The children love recording on the computer and listening to their own voices read the stories back to them.

"My first year as a principal, we had a little boy in the special education preschool class who would not speak at all when he came to school. He spoke his first words to

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the computer while using the *Breakthrough* software. It was a shining moment.

"Another little girl came to kindergarten refusing to say a word. She would not speak except to the computer or the *Breakthrough* elephant. It took until about January before she got the confidence to start speaking to the other people in the class. *Breakthrough to Literacy* helped her gain that confidence."

Enthusiasm for Reading

"The children love to share with each other," continues Ms. Sharp. "It's not chitchat; it's actually sharing and talking about the story. The teachers say, 'If they're over at the computer, they're talking about the books. They're talking about what they're reading.'

"I see such enthusiasm for reading because the kids are experiencing success. They get so excited they're jumping out of their skin! They want to read all the *Breakthrough* stories. They'll ask if they can read a story that hasn't yet been their Book-of-the-Week, and the teacher will say, 'Go ahead!' When they're confident enough to say, 'Can I read the next book?' that's BIG for a first grader. They're learning, and you can see their excitement. *Breakthrough to Literacy* is a very positive experience for them.

"The teachers in the following grades are all commenting that the kids who had *Breakthrough* the year before are coming in reading much better than they did in the past. They have definitely noticed a difference."

Ms. Sharp has seen the power of *Breakthrough* to cross the divide of language as well as achievement gaps. "We have quite a few Hispanic children who come to us vocabulary-deficient in both English and Spanish. Since we began using *Breakthrough*, the Bilingual teachers have noticed something interesting. The kids who start school either totally non-English speaking or very limited in their English skills are now building vocabulary in both English and Spanish. When they use the *Breakthrough* program, they learn new English words. Then they ask the teacher what the word is in Spanish. The teacher tells them the word in Spanish and writes it out. So now they're learning vocabulary in two languages."

Most of all, Ms. Sharp understands that these children have gained something precious – a real love of reading. "When *Breakthrough* first started, I walked into one of the first-grade classes fairly early in the year. The room was filled with kids reading. They were all in little groups. I remember this group of five kids. They'd go to the table. Each child would take a turn picking one of the *Breakthrough* books. Then they'd all go sit on the floor and read the book together. Their little fingers were going across the page as they read each word. When they finished the book, they'd all get up and go to the table, pick another book, and read again. They kept reading the books, over and over.

"I thought, Wow! I've never seen a group that was so excited about reading. I asked, 'Are they showing off for me?'

And the teacher said, 'No, they do this all the time. They do this all the time.'"

Lincoln Elementary

Enrollment	530
Free/Reduced Lunches	88.5%
Demographics	
African American	38%
Hispanic	59%
Caucasian	3%
Asian American	0%

For more information

Nancy Sharp
Principal
Lincoln Elementary School
2001 E. 135th Street
East Chicago, Indiana 46312
219-391-4096
nsharp@ecps.k12.in.us

Teachers notice that children who have used *Breakthrough to Literacy* are much better prepared for school in the fall.

McKinley Elementary

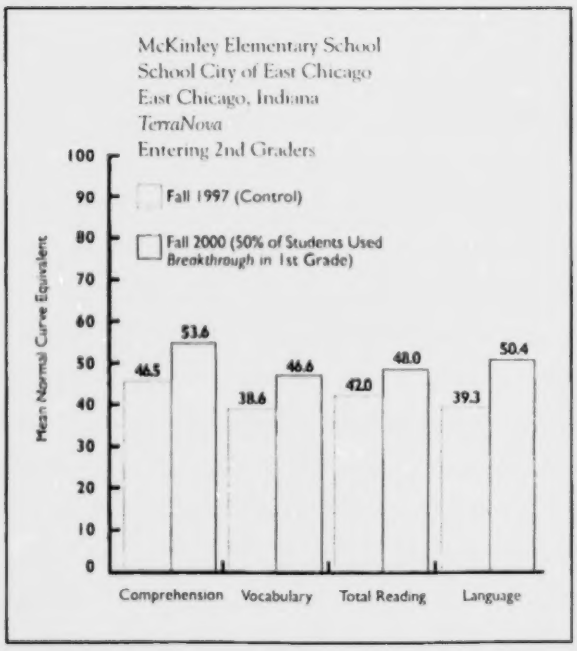
"I give *Breakthrough to Literacy* two thumbs up. It's an excellent program for the teachers, the children, the parents, and the administrators."
Rose Marie Velasquez
Principal

"I see your legs are for dancing," Miss Rose Velasquez tells a youngster in the lunchroom. His dark eyes shine and a smile slides across his face. This first grader knows exactly what his principal is talking about. She has read his story about this favorite activity, posted in the hallway outside his classroom. The boy beams with pride, knowing that he and his writing are valued.

Walls throughout McKinley Elementary are lined with children's work. Today, the first-grade teachers posted stories the children had written in response to *Legs*, their *Breakthrough to Literacy* Book-of-the-Week. Miss Velasquez always takes time to read the stories as she walks by, and she makes a point of telling the children how proud she is of each of them.

The largest of East Chicago's elementary schools, McKinley presents a well-tended and friendly learning environment, but struggles with overcrowding. Nearby single-family homes now harbor as many as three families each. "We're living in a depressed area," Miss Velasquez says. "Our student mobility is very high. Out of 100 sixth graders, we have only about 20 children who were here from kindergarten on. And our kindergartners start school two to three years behind in many of their skills."

Throughout School City of East Chicago, children wear red, white, or navy blue shirts and black or blue pants in compliance with this urban district's "uniformity of color" policy, instituted to help combat gangs in the schools. Exemplary behavior is the norm for McKinley's students, who are motivated by the excitement of learning and the positive attention of their teachers.



A Driving Force

According to Miss Velasquez, *Breakthrough to Literacy* is a large contributor to the children's excitement about academics, and its professional development is a driving force for the 19 kindergarten through second-grade teachers who participate in it.

"I've seen tremendous growth in the teachers since we began our *Breakthrough* training," Miss Velasquez says. "Their communication with each other has risen to a more professional level. They discuss articles and books they've read, ideas that they've been exposed to, more than ever before.

"There's a special camaraderie among the *Breakthrough* teachers. In their training meetings and during their literacy coach visits, they share celebrations of their students' successes. They talk about what is happening in their classrooms and expand on each other's ideas. They're excited, and the other teachers notice it, too.

"As soon as we learned that McKinley could beta test the grade two *Breakthrough* program, all seven of our second-grade teachers signed up immediately. They usually ask a lot of questions about a program beforehand. But they were ready to go with *Breakthrough*, no questions asked.

Hands-On Training

"Our *Breakthrough* literacy coach knows our teachers and what their needs are," notes Miss Velasquez. "No matter what kind of workshop she does for them, she applies it to their needs. She is very passionate about *Breakthrough to Literacy*. She doesn't mind rolling up her sleeves and going into a classroom and working alongside a teacher.

"The *Breakthrough* training is hands-on. And what the teachers walk away with, they can apply in the classroom the following day. The training does more than just help our staff teach reading and writing to the children. What the teachers learn about questioning techniques and classroom centers, for example, carries into science, social studies, and other curricular areas.

"Part of the teachers' training is about collecting the *Breakthrough* data and using it to plan for each student. They can get immediate results back from *Breakthrough*'s software reports. They don't have to wait for anyone to grade an assessment."

The teacher is at the center of the *Breakthrough* classroom.

Two Thumbs Up

Successes gained through *Breakthrough* can be seen in the children's attitudes, says Miss Velasquez. "Our attendance is improving. The children want to be here. They want to be part of the *Breakthrough* program. They don't want to miss anything. We're not at the attendance level that we would like, say 98 percent, but we're moving up there. We're close to 97 percent now.

"Many of our Hispanic children come from other countries and have no English skills at all when they arrive. Usually, LEP [limited English proficient] students have a long silent period when they're learning English, because they don't feel confident. But with *Breakthrough*, they can go back and click on a word as many times as they need to hear it. And they can listen to their own voices compared to the model. This makes them much more confident, and the silent period is shorter for them. *Breakthrough* is a wonderful program for the LEP children. But it's a wonderful program for all the children. It's very prescriptive for each child.

"With other programs used in our district, the teachers get trained, but the administrators don't. But with *Breakthrough*, before implementation takes place, principals have an initial meeting with the consultant – the literacy coach. This summer, we administrators were trained to understand the grade-two program's components and to retrieve information from the *Breakthrough* reports. It was very interesting.

"I give *Breakthrough to Literacy* two thumbs up. It's an excellent program for the teachers, the children, the parents, and the administrators. We have never, ever had a problem with the training. We don't feel that we were sold a bill of goods and left alone, like many programs do to schools. I haven't been let down yet; and the teachers and children have not been let down either."

McKinley Elementary

Enrollment	805
Free/Reduced Lunches	72.6%
Demographics	
African American	17.3%
Hispanic	76%
Caucasian	5.1%
Asian American	1%

For more information

Rose Marie Velasquez
Principal
McKinley Elementary School
4825 Magoun
East Chicago, Indiana 46312
219-391-4186
rvelasquez@ecps.org

Norfolk Public Schools

"When we got into the research, we saw a direct match with the essential practices of *Breakthrough to Literacy*."

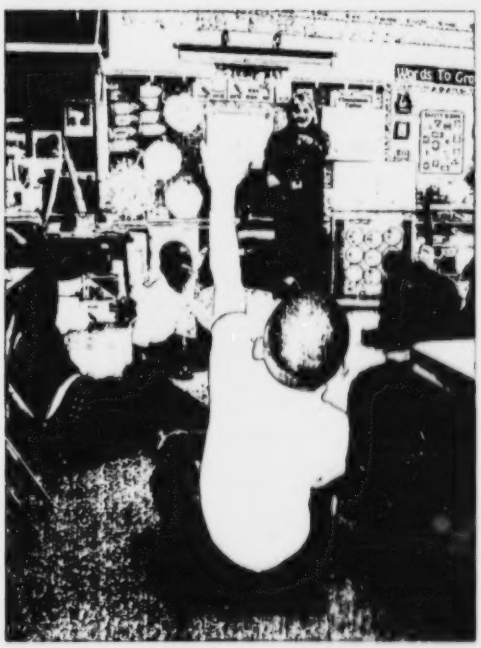
Mark Tavernier
Senior Coordinator of
Communication Skills

From his downtown office, Mark Tavernier, Senior Coordinator of Communication Skills for Norfolk Public Schools, looks out at a city awash in change. New office buildings replace older ones. Crisscrossed highways and bridges carry more and more traffic between the city and its near neighbors, Portsmouth and Virginia Beach. Throughout Norfolk, city housing projects are being torn down and replaced with middle-income homes, luxury condos, or new businesses.

But change has its consequences. As low-income housing is demolished, the families who inhabit them could be left homeless. When beach season ends and hotel rates plunge, many poor families move to hotel rooms in Virginia Beach. They return to Norfolk when room rates in Virginia Beach rise in the spring. Some live in campgrounds. Some live with relatives. And the children move from school to school.

Poverty isn't the only factor that contributes to the transience of Norfolk's population. This is a Navy town, a university town, and the home of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Each group adds to the rich variety of the city, leaving its imprint behind as parents are transferred, young people graduate, or foreign-service personnel return home.

"Like any urban area, Norfolk has an assortment of challenges," says Tavernier. "We have single-parent families, concentrations of high poverty, high student mobility, and a lack of readiness skills. Yet, with all these stresses, education is very valued in Norfolk. Our city council shows that value with budgetary support. The city recognizes that education is the cornerstone to a vital community."



Book-of-the-Week time motivates children to participate in oral language experiences that build comprehension and other higher-order thinking skills.

Supporting Children Who Have Great Needs

In 1994–95, Norfolk Public Schools first implemented Breakthrough to Literacy (then called Foundations in Reading). "We were trying to make sure kids who had great needs were getting enough support," says Dr. Marycarolyn France, Senior Coordinator of Planning and Evaluation for the Department of Compensatory Education Programs. "After careful consideration, the district implemented Breakthrough to Literacy at three pilot schools.

"These were all Title I schools with very high poverty. We were trying to make sure that kids who have great needs were getting enough support.

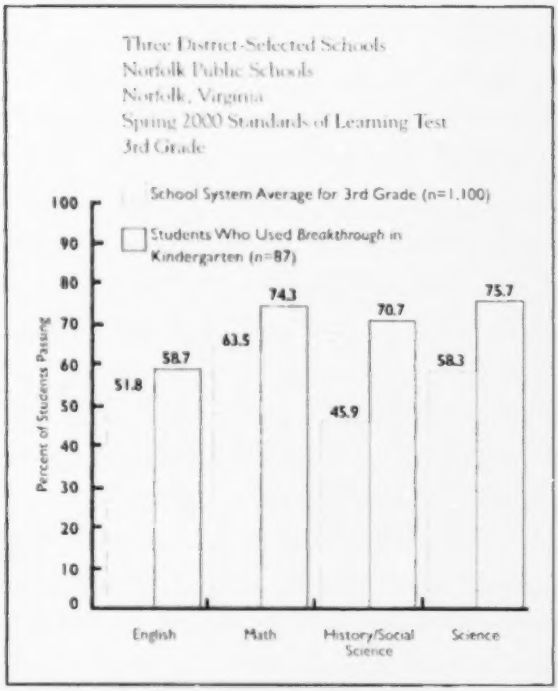
"We looked at several different programs. *Breakthrough* looked like it might be good because of the computer support system, and because it was a comprehensive language arts program, rather than just software. It fit with our philosophy of having a balanced literacy program," says Dr. France.

"When I came into my current position three years ago," Tavernier adds, "*Breakthrough* was in over 50% of our elementary schools. People have clamored for the program. The superintendent, who was also new at the time, asked me to put together a strategic focus plan for reading instruction. So, a group of teachers, principals, and I met regularly for the better part of a semester. We looked at the National Reading Panel report and the best practices in the teaching of reading, and we put a local reading plan together.

There was overwhelming support for *Breakthrough* because of the experiences the people had with it.

"When we got into the research, such as *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* and *Starting Out Right*, we saw such a complete, direct match with the essential practices of *Breakthrough to Literacy* and with the practices advocated by both the National Reading Panel and CIERA. Especially in early emergent reading, kindergarten in particular, the research was very parallel. And the essential practices, the things *Breakthrough* really does best, fit perfectly! Why would you not want it?

"The University of Virginia was contracted by the state to develop the PALS test at about the same time this early literacy research came out," continues Tavernier. "The folks who developed the research helped develop the test. It all fits. It's all connected. And that's the power of *Breakthrough*. The four essential practices are characteristic of any good kindergarten classroom. And everything we know about what early emergent readers need and how we assess that, they're three prongs of the same fork. So it's a perfect match. I think that's why our teachers and our principals really like the program."



A Good Investment

The evidence of *Breakthrough*'s success is more than just anecdotal, however. At the end of the 1999–2000 school year, researchers within the district evaluated the retention histories of third graders from three schools in which *Breakthrough* had been used with kindergartners in 1996–97. Comparing retention rates for *Breakthrough* students with district averages, researchers found that fewer students who had used *Breakthrough to Literacy* in kindergarten were later retained in first, second, or third grade. This benefit was evident even up to three years after the children had used *Breakthrough*.

In addition, Dr. Fred Bateman of Old Dominion University did a study of the 1999–2000 Standards of Learning assessment scores for students who had used *Breakthrough* during the 1996–97 school year in three Norfolk elementary schools and compared them with the school system average. Dr. Beverly Roane, Senior Director of Norfolk Public Schools' Department of Research, Testing, and Statistics, worked in conjunction with Dr. Bateman. The results showed that *Breakthrough* students' scores exceeded the district average in every content area.

Because of *Breakthrough*'s consistent record of success, Norfolk Public Schools has made a significant commitment to their implementations. The district employs two full-time facilitators, who provide training and follow-up coaching to most of the *Breakthrough* teachers. "We knew up front that we would expand pretty rapidly," Tavernier says. "And, because we have so many new kindergarten teachers every year, we knew we needed to have people who could do the training and follow-up support. Today, all 35 of our elementary schools are *Breakthrough to Literacy* schools. We have 181 *Breakthrough* classrooms."

"*Breakthrough* is one of the things we do for children in poverty because they deserve to have a level playing field with everybody else," says Dr. France. "*Breakthrough* is a good investment. It's a program that prevents problems from occurring."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

For more information
Mark Tavernier
Senior Coordinator of Communication Skills
Norfolk Public Schools
800 East City Hall Avenue
Norfolk, Virginia 23510
757-628-3899
mtaverni@nps.k12.va.us

Larrymore Elementary

"The children want to be here. They want to be part of the *Breakthrough* program."
Linda O'Konek, Ed.D.
Principal

"Come in," Linda O'Konek says to two kindergartners, who have tapped softly on her office door. They hold hands as they enter the principal's office, proudly carrying the stories they have written.

"What will you read to me today?" Dr. O'Konek asks as the children climb onto the leather loveseat near her. Lamplight spills onto the papers in their laps. The welcoming warmth and soft classical music give the feeling of being in a comfortable living room with a favorite aunt.

In the children's classroom, the *Breakthrough* Book-of-the-Week is *Arm-in-Arm*, a story of two friends just like them. The girls take turns reading their own stories about friends.

"Oh, you're just so good!" Dr. O'Konek exclaims when they have finished. "I'm so proud of you," she says, and offers them each a sticker.

"Can we come back and read another story?" they ask on their way out the door.

"Yes!" she replies. "I'll see you soon."

Making Great Gains

"*Breakthrough to Literacy* has assisted us in raising the bar and the level of reading and writing expectations within our kindergarten," says Dr. O'Konek. "Our kindergarten teachers have three guided reading groups as well as writing groups. The *Breakthrough* materials are very helpful; they're a wonderful resource. We see a tremendous improvement in the reading and writing skills of our students because of *Breakthrough*.

"Several years ago we had two Reading Recovery teachers. One of the significant things we noticed was that the majority of the students picked up for Reading Recovery in first grade were non-*Breakthrough* students. Only one or two students picked up for Reading Recovery had used *Breakthrough*. We certainly saw a strong correlation: The students who had been through *Breakthrough* didn't need the additional intensive training of Reading Recovery.

"A couple of years ago, I created a program called STARS, which stands for Strategies for At-Risk Students. This program was built on a special education model, but it was for non special-education children – children who ordinarily would fall through the cracks. These students had been retained once, twice, and sometimes three times. They had been through comprehensive evaluations and still did not qualify for special education. In spite of their best efforts, they continued to struggle in school.

"So I wrote a grant to set up a primary class and an upper elementary class. In the primary class, we included *Breakthrough* as one of the additional resources. When they entered the program, these children were significantly behind in reading. By definition of being a 'slow learner,' they had not made one year's growth within one year's time.

"For whatever reason, those children had just missed the building blocks for reading. By focusing on where they were developmentally – something that *Breakthrough* does particularly well – they were able to make great gains. At the end of the year, all of the children in the primary class had made one year's growth. Many of them made two years' growth in reading, and some made three years' growth in reading."

Breakthrough to Literacy equips students to be independent readers.

Outstanding Professional Development

Children aren't the only ones who are growing with *Breakthrough to Literacy*, says Dr. O'Konek. "We also see teachers engaging in less whole-group instruction and more small-group and individual instruction.

"The professional development and coaching follow-up *Breakthrough* provides are outstanding. They really deliver what they promise. The training sessions are developmentally appropriate for teachers. They guide the teachers through different stages of *Breakthrough to Literacy* implementation.

"Teachers return from *Breakthrough* training with enthusiasm, excitement and eagerness to try all the new techniques they have learned. The literacy coaches are available to answer questions and work one on one with teachers. They demonstrate lessons, run reports, adjust instruction times on the computers, meet with principals to discuss needs and concerns, and are willing to do anything asked of them.

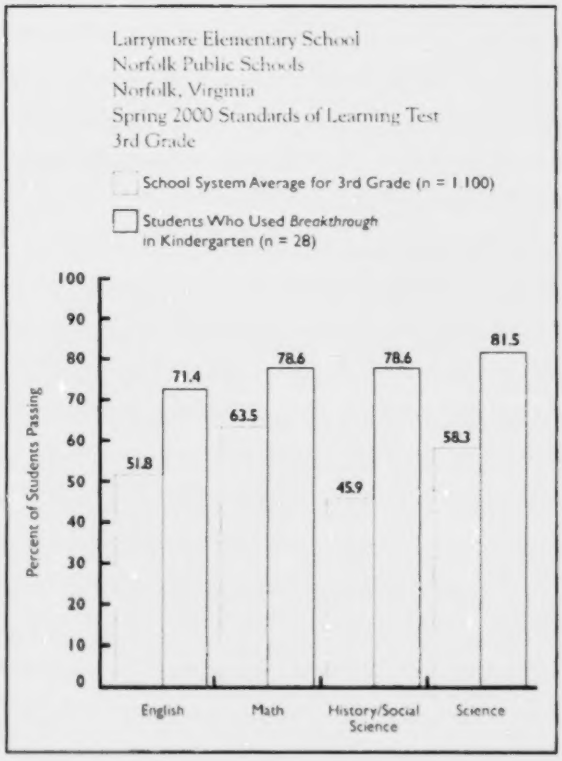
"One year, we had a teacher new to our school, who taught in the traditional, whole-group instruction method. At the end of her first year of using *Breakthrough*, the light bulb just went off. She saw the connections. The following year, it was like she was a different teacher. She integrated all of the *Breakthrough* books, did interdisciplinary teaching, and made the connection between reading and writing. In addition to the *Breakthrough* literacy coach, she had the support of our district *Breakthrough to Literacy* facilitator."

Meeting Each Child's Needs

Kindergarten instruction at Larrymore has moved beyond teaching a letter every week to authentic reading and writing instruction that challenges each child and meets each child's developmental needs, says Dr. O'Konek.

"Children are so engaged in learning to read and write that they no longer want or need a 'housekeeping center.' Naptime disappears by January. Students who don't want a nap can be found reading the *Breakthrough* stories on the computer, coloring in their Take-Me-Home books, or reading a Big Book.

"The quality of the materials is outstanding! Students and teachers love the stories. And, because the program is individualized, the *Breakthrough* materials allow us to accelerate the instructional program for the gifted student and provide reinforcement and practice for the reluctant learner. Even children with attention difficulties sit perfectly still for 15 to 20 minutes and are mesmerized by the visual and auditory activities on the computer.



"Since we began using *Breakthrough to Literacy* five years ago, we have seen a significant improvement in reading and writing proficiency. Many visitors to the building mistakenly identify our kindergartners' writings as those of first or second graders.

"At the end of our first year with *Breakthrough*, we met with our first-grade teachers. We told them to throw away those old lesson plans because the students they would receive in the fall were reading and writing at a significantly higher level than any group we'd ever had before.

"If I could only have one instructional resource for my school, I would select *Breakthrough to Literacy*," concludes Dr. O'Konek. "Every school and every child deserves it. We can't live without it!"

Larrymore Elementary

Enrollment	611
Free/Reduced Lunches	54.07%
Demographics	
African American	59.08%
Hispanic	2.95%
Caucasian	34.53%
Asian American	3.44%

For more information

Linda O'Konek, Ed.D.
Principal
Larrymore Elementary School
7600 Halprin Drive
Norfolk, Virginia 23518
757-531-3070
lokonek@nps.k12.va.us

Norview Elementary

"A teacher is the most important aspect of *Breakthrough to Literacy*."
Sandra Cox
Principal

" 'Moo, moo,' went the cow. 'Wuff, wuff,' went the dog. 'Quack, quack,' went the duck.' "

Two little girls – their jet-black braids decorated with brightly colored barrettes – read aloud together from their *Breakthrough to Literacy* Take-Me-Home books. Their small legs, dangling from the burgundy couch, swing in time to the rhythm of *The Farm Concert*. They quack and oink and baa along with the story animals until the climax:" 'Quiet!' yelled the farmer. 'I can't sleep.' "

The girls dissolve in giggles as they read on, in whispers now, "'Moo, moo,' went the cow. 'Wuff, wuff,' went the dog. 'Quack, quack,' went the duck. ..." And finally, with great satisfaction, they read, "'Good,' said the farmer. 'I can sleep.'"

When the bell rings, the girls pick up their backpacks and head out a back door of the main school building. Heads high, they march down Achieve Avenue, turn right on Believe Boulevard, and pass Succeed Street to their kindergarten classroom.

Breakthrough's quality professional development helps teachers provide appropriate instruction for each child.

Seeing Is Believing

In Norview Elementary, "Achieve," "Believe," and "Succeed" are more than just street signs posted on the sides of portable classrooms. They are goals that children, teachers, and staff strive for each day. Principal Sandra Cox is confident that these goals are possible for every one of her students. She gives much credit to the solid foundation of Norview's kindergarten program, which is largely organized around *Breakthrough to Literacy*.

"This is my first year as a principal," Ms. Cox says. "Prior to this, I worked at the central office as a reading specialist. When I first learned about *Breakthrough to Literacy*, I was such an unbeliever. I'd been a kindergarten teacher myself, and I said, 'You mean they're on the computers all day? What are they going to miss?'

"Then Norfolk's communications specialist, Mark Tavernier, and I went to Norview to observe the *Breakthrough* program in use. I saw it work! I remember the kindergarten children shoving books at me, saying, 'Can I read to you?'

"A strength of the program is how the teachers have grown. They realize now that they don't have to be talking all the time, that their role as a teacher is as a coach. For example, in a class I visited this morning, the teacher was working with some children in a group. Some children were working in centers. A helper was working with some children on their writing. And some children were working on the computer.

"We don't have to have children in our face every second for them to learn. That's all a mind change, especially if you've been

teaching a while. You figure, 'They really do need to hear me because I'm the fount of all knowledge.' And while a teacher is the most important aspect of *Breakthrough* – and I really do believe that's true – if the teacher doesn't believe in it and doesn't think it will work, it won't. She must engage the children, and *Breakthrough to Literacy* gives her the tools to do so."

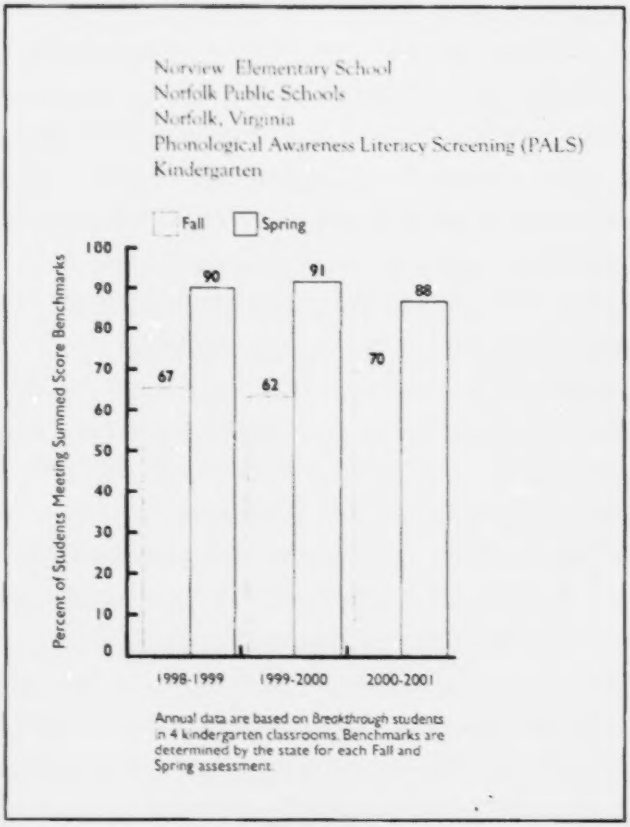
Integration across the Curriculum

"When you look in the classrooms and see how teachers are integrating the use of books with our curriculum, you can see that *Breakthrough* has made it easy for them," says Ms. Cox. "Before *Breakthrough*, when you'd say, 'Integrate your curriculum,' the teachers would say, 'Oh, now I have to go find the books, and I have to find the materials.' That's one of the strengths that I see with *Breakthrough*. Teachers have figured out, 'I can do this. I have the Big Book. They have the Take-Me-Home books to go home. We have it on the computer. This is how I can integrate with my shared reading or with the guided reading group or independent reading, or whatever area.'

"With all the varied titles, fiction, nonfiction, all kinds of formats of the little books, *Breakthrough* helps teachers integrate across the curriculum. In kindergarten, it's so easy to integrate if you have the materials, but that's often a stumbling block. *Breakthrough* makes it easy: This book goes with plants, or with social studies, or whatever it is that I'm going to teach. And, of course, you're always teaching communication skills."

High Expectations

Ms. Cox sees strong evidence of the children's progress. "I can see the results of the program in the children's writing. That's the application of what they're learning. Last week [late November], I was in two kindergarten classes, and it was interesting to see how many strategies they already had.



"I remember the day that we said, 'Kindergartners can't write! Kindergartners can't read; they're only memorizing.' But *Breakthrough* has changed the face of the way kindergarten looks. We have more writing, and it's connected to the reading. Kindergarten has become a more challenging place to be. It's not the old days of play. And some people are critical that it's gotten too tough. But our state standards are tough. We have high expectations for children. And they can do it. They can. With the right support, the right classrooms, they can do it. And they love it.

"When you look at the print that is around the kindergarten rooms, the charts, what children know about writing and reading, it's amazing. The first-grade teachers are so happy. When the children come to first grade after using *Breakthrough*, they're ready. They are ready!"

Norview Elementary

Enrollment	507
Free/Reduced Lunches	83.30%
Demographics	
African American	80.47%
Hispanic	1.38%
Caucasian	17.16%
Asian American	<1%

For more information

Sandra Cox
Principal
Norview Elementary School
6401 Chesapeake Boulevard
Norfolk, Virginia 23513
757-852-4660
scox@nps.k12.va.us

St. Helena Elementary

"*Breakthrough to Literacy* is the best thing that could have happened to St. Helena."
Lillian Thomas
Principal

"Why is he crying?" principal Lillian Thomas asks the kindergarten teacher. She gestures to the smallest child in the room (whom we will call "Benito"). The little boy sits near his mother, sobbing.

"Benito has been doing that all week," his teacher, Miss Young, says. "He doesn't care what we do. He just wants to go home."

Mrs. Thomas gathers the children around her. "Let's play a game." She invites Benito to join them.

The small boy silently refuses.

Mrs. Thomas tells Benito's mother that her son will be all right; she can go home. As the young woman leaves the room, she shakes her head. She has been here every day since school began. She knows the extent of her son's despair.

"You'll be doing so many fun things in kindergarten!" Mrs. Thomas says to the children. "You'll get to listen to stories, and learn things, and play outside at recess."

Benito seems unimpressed.

Mrs. Thomas scans the room for an idea. "Who would like to work on the computer?" she asks. A few children raise their hands. Benito does not.

The principal tries another tack. "Children, please go to the center you like best." Youngsters move to various parts of the room, but Benito stays put. She stoops down next to him. "Tell me your name," she says. He is stone faced and silent.

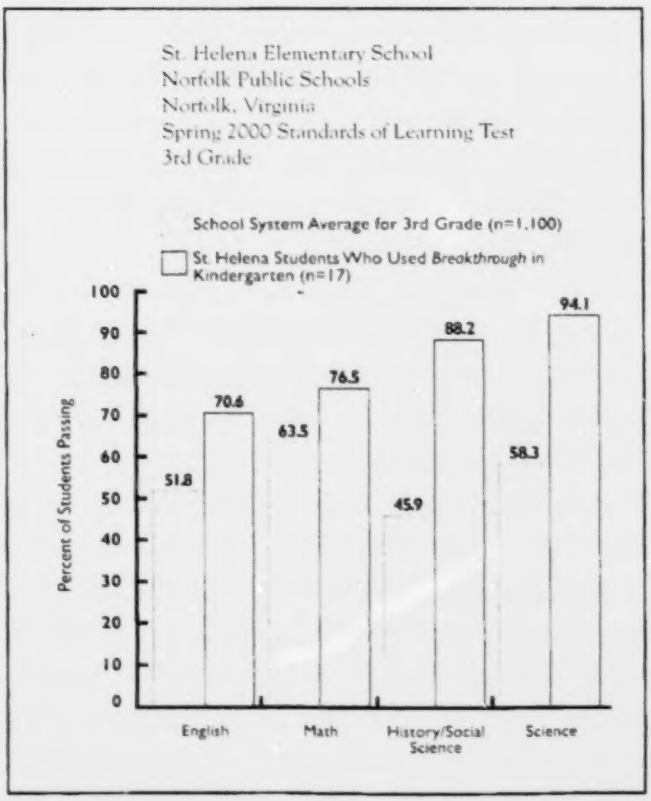
Mrs. Thomas asks, "Do you want to go with me, Benito?"

"Yes," he whispers hopefully. Mrs. Thomas leads him to the back of the room. The tears begin again; she is not taking him home.

Miss Young starts the *Breakthrough* program on a computer. A bright blue screen appears, showing a smiling elephant backed by multi-colored starbursts.

Benito allows the principal to guide him to the computer. Together, they listen to stories read by engaging voices. She shows him how to use the mouse to turn the pages by himself. He sits in rapt attention while the stories unfold.

Slowly, the shell around Benito begins to crack. In *Breakthrough to Literacy*'s Listen to Stories program, he finally has found something to engage him in kindergarten.



Individualized Instruction

Mrs. Thomas credits *Breakthrough to Literacy* with Benito's initial positive response to kindergarten. But Benito isn't the only reason she likes the program. *Breakthrough*'s instruction is individualized for each child. The children get an opportunity to move at their own pace. And, I like the phonetic approach, because phonemic awareness is very important for children who are learning how to read.

"Phonemic awareness is a great predictor of a child's performance on the *Test for Higher Standards*, which we use in Norfolk, as well as the *Standards of Learning Test*. If a

child doesn't have good phonemic awareness, he's going to struggle. Phonics, too, should be a solid part of any reading program. *Breakthrough* gives children individual strategies to learn phonics skills and reinforces what the teacher has taught.

"Most of our kindergarten children come in with no clue about letters and sounds or that combinations of letters make words. We have children who come to kindergarten with some beginning reading skills, and some – very few – who can read. We also have some who haven't had any formal teaching. *Breakthrough* helps a lot, because it engages children, provides repetition, and allows teachers to easily individualize instruction.

"*Breakthrough* is good for all levels of children, because you can set the program for their individual needs. *Breakthrough* raises the children's performance—even those that start so low. Because of *Breakthrough*, many of our kindergartners are going to first grade and continuing on, and doing well."

Support from Parents

Breakthrough's technology provides administrators and teachers with useful opportunities to reach out to parents and involve them in their children's learning, says Mrs. Thomas. "Our parents say, 'My child loves using the computer.' The kindergarten teachers walk the parents through the program at Open House. Then they go into more detail during parent-teacher conferences. If a teacher has a concern with a child's performance, she may pull out the *Breakthrough* reports on that particular child's progress and discuss them with the parent.

"We have had parents say, 'Thank you!' They are not frightened by the thought of their kindergartners using the computer; they love it. Even children who don't have computers at home learn quickly. They can click and get what they need. They know what to do.

"When the children listen to the *Breakthrough* stories on the computer, it helps them learn to read with expression. It lets them know that what they see on the screen is what the man is saying or what the lady is saying. It helps them develop that neurological process that says, 'These letters and words make these sentences. And when I hold the book in my hand, these letters and words still make these sentences.'

"Some parents say, 'Children read in kindergarten? Oh, my gosh!' But most parents want their kids to read in kindergarten. *Breakthrough*'s curriculum and materials are very age-appropriate."

Significant Value

Breakthrough has become an integral part of the St. Helena curriculum, says Mrs. Thomas. "At the grade-level meetings, when one teacher says her children haven't mastered a concept, another teacher may piggyback and say, 'I think some of the *Breakthrough* strategies would work,' or, 'Maybe you should try this . . . .'

"In this building, the kindergarten teachers are all teaming because of *Breakthrough*. They are networking, talking in their grade-level meetings. They're sharing ideas and teaching strategies. The materials offer so much for the teachers to use, and they depend on it. I think if we took *Breakthrough* out of the building, our kindergarten program would crash.

"The day I walked into St. Helena, I was presented with a list of things going on in the school. I saw *Breakthrough* and thought, Okay, what's this? I soon saw significant value in it. *Breakthrough* offers the types of things that I would do if I were a kindergarten teacher. It's not a question of whether we'll keep *Breakthrough*. *Breakthrough to Literacy* is the best thing that could have happened to St. Helena."

Breakthrough builds comfortable, confident readers, writers, and thinkers.

St. Helena Elementary

Enrollment	185
Free/Reduced Lunches	66.78%
Demographics	
African American	100%
Hispanic	0%
Caucasian	0%
Asian American	0%

For more information

Lillian Thomas
Principal
St. Helena Elementary School
903 South Main Street
Norfolk, Virginia 23523
757-494-3884
lthomas@nps.k12.va.us

Breakthrough to Literacy:
From Research to Results

Breakthrough to Literacy far exceeds the industry norm for investing in teachers' professional development.

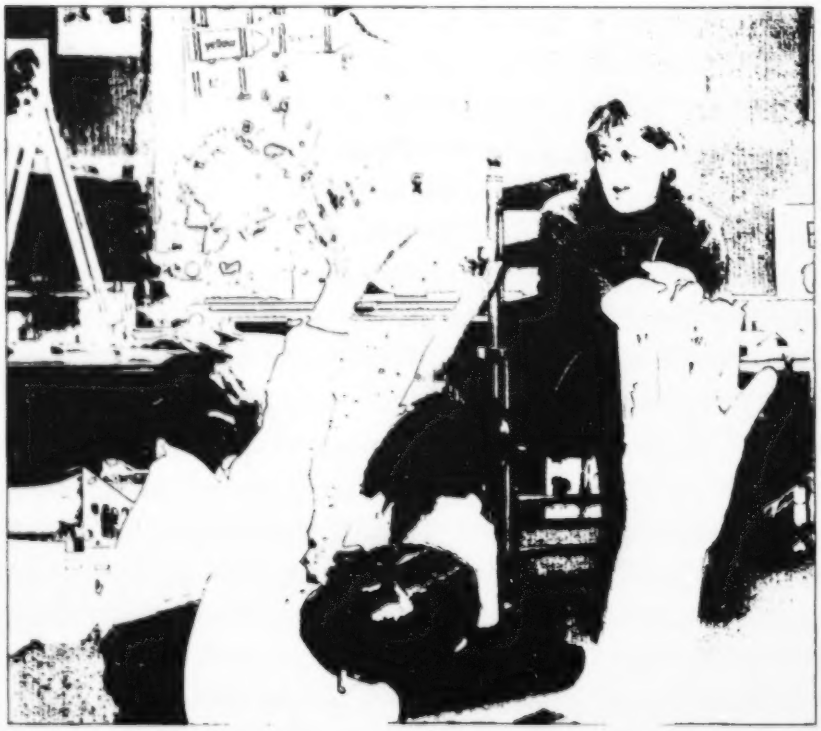
Jerry Zimmermann
and Carolyn Brown

Breakthrough to Literacy is the result of more than 20 years of research in the university laboratory and in classrooms across the country. Our research has provided important insights into how children make the links between oral language and print, and how teachers effectively engage children and provide the systematic instruction they need to become successful readers. In developing *Breakthrough*, we have focused on those areas that early literacy research has shown to be critical: vocabulary, oral and written comprehension, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, and word-recognition skills.

Breakthrough's strategies and tools – refined by ongoing assessment and research in classrooms in 40 states – help teachers engage children and enhance their performance in areas critical to reading and language development.

Our staff of full-time literacy coaches provides teachers with the elements that researchers have identified as essential to reading success:

1. an integrated view of language and literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and
2. the tools to build an effective early language and literacy environment in the classroom.



Professional development centered on research-based practices builds teachers' skills and confidence in the classroom.

Blue-Ribbon Support

Recent reports from blue-ribbon groups investigating the state of America's early literacy education reinforce Breakthrough's philosophy as well as its methodology.

In its 1998 landmark review of early literacy research, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, the National Research Council (NRC) made it clear that effective teaching instruction is an emerging science – with knowable methodologies and measurable outcomes – as well as an art. On pages 2 and 3, the Council states,

> Good instruction seems to transcend characterizations of children's vulnerability for failure; the same good early literacy environment and patterns of instruction are required for children who might fail for different reasons.
>
> Does this mean that the identical mix of instructional materials and strategies will work for each and every child? *Of course not* [emphasis added]. If we have learned anything from this effort, it is that effective teachers are able to craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with. But it does mean that there is a common menu of materials, strategies, and environments from which effective teachers make choices. This in turn means that, as a society, our most important challenge is to make sure that our teachers have access to those tools and knowledge required to use them well.

Quality Instruction for Every Child

There is, however, an important issue on which Breakthrough to Literacy parts company with the National Research Council. That is on the critical question of whether all children deserve the same level of individualized instruction – or whether large numbers of children in disadvantaged, urban districts should have to settle for instruction that focuses on raising the class or school average without meeting each child's individual needs.

Extensive research, empirical observation, and common sense make a clear point: The children who are most at risk of reading failure also are the ones who most need teachers who can interact with them as individuals and who can provide the materials and instructional strategies that address their individual needs. Indeed, the promise to serve each and every student is at the heart of the new federal legislation, *No Child Left Behind*.

This conviction drives the *Breakthrough to Literacy* process. It also is why students who have used *Breakthrough* continue to demonstrate noticeable and sustained improvement across socioeconomic and demographic lines – in districts with high percentages of children at risk of reading failure as well

Daily writing instills pride as children express their ideas on paper.

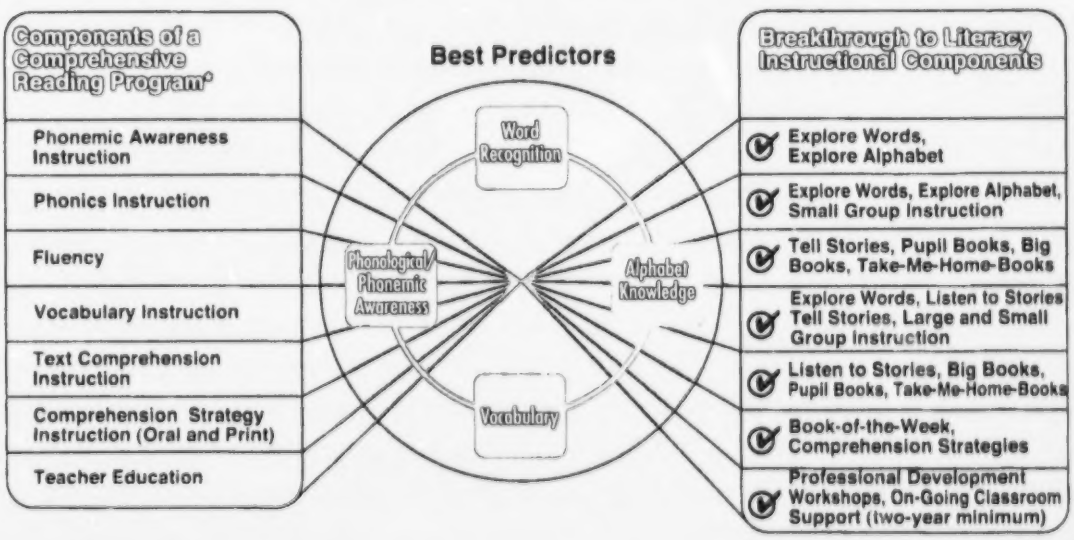
as in districts with few students at risk. In this, *Breakthrough* adheres to the spirit as well as the letter of the NRC's own assertion: "Good instruction seems to transcend characterizations of children's vulnerability for failure; the same good early literacy environment and patterns of instruction are required for children who might fail for different reasons."

Alignment to the National Reading Panel (NRP) Report

Breakthrough to Literacy also is consistent with the 1999 *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read.* In sharp contrast to many other early literacy programs, the developers of *Breakthrough*, like the Panel, understand and explicitly recognize that an effective reading program must teach, but cannot focus primarily on, phonics (NRP, page 2–134). They agree with the Panel's conclusion that teachers must be informed participants in the process of reading education, fully aware of the "what," the "how," and the "why" of language and reading development. For this reason, the professional development and in-classroom support that is part of the *Breakthrough* process far exceeds the industry norm for investing in teachers.

Teachers continue to say that the *Breakthrough* program breathes life into the findings and conclusions of the National Reading Panel. This is no surprise. Breakthrough's conceptual framework, curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment are driven by the same predictors of reading achievement from which the NRP's conclusions emerged. Most important, our commitment to long-term, intensive professional development and in-classroom support allows teachers to see the relationships between the conclusions of the NRP (the six components of a successful early reading program*), the predictors of reading success, and *Breakthrough to Literacy*.

Alignment of National Reading Panel and Breakthrough to Literacy


Components of a Comprehensive Reading Program*
Phonemic Awareness Instruction
Phonics Instruction
Fluency
Vocabulary Instruction
Text Comprehension Instruction
Comprehension Strategy Instruction (Oral and Print)
Teacher Education
Best Predictors
Word Recognition
Phonological/ Phonemic Awareness
Alphabet Knowledge
Vocabulary
Breakthrough to Literacy Instructional Components
Explore Words, Explore Alphabet
Explore Words, Explore Alphabet, Small Group Instruction
Tell Stories, Pupil Books, Big Books, Take-Me-Home-Books
Explore Words, Listen to Stories Tell Stories, Large and Small Group Instruction
Listen to Stories, Big Books, Pupil Books, Take-Me-Home-Books
Book-of-the-Week, Comprehension Strategies
Professional Development Workshops, On-Going Classroom Support (two-year minimum)

*Report of the National Reading Panel

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

If *Breakthrough* does, indeed, "breathe life" into the conclusions of the NRP report, it does so because it provides teachers with the knowledge, tools, and instructional practices to make every child successful in each of the six dimensions of reading. The developers and employees of Breakthrough to Literacy have been fortunate to play a role in helping educators engage, excite, and motivate their students to become successful readers.

Breakthrough to Literacy remains committed to providing teachers with the knowledge and tools that research shows are required to reach each and every child. In partnership with administrators, teachers, and children, we will continue to build effective early literacy environments in which *all* children will feel valued and *no* child will be left behind.

Breakthrough to Literacy creates fluent readers who comprehend what they read.

Selected Suggested Readings

Adams, M.J. (1990). Outside-in models of reading: What skilled readers look like they do. *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 95-106.

Biemiller, A. (1999). *Language and Reading Success*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

Biemiller, Andrew (2001). Teaching vocabulary: Early direct and sequential. *American Educator*, 24-28.

Chall, J.S. (1983/1996). *Stages of Reading Development*. (2nd edition). New York, NY: Harcourt Brace.

Chall, J.S. (2000). *The Academic Achievement Challenge: What Really Works in Classrooms*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 8 (1). Journal online. Available from http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1; Internet.

Ehri, L.C. (2000). Learning to read and learning to spell: Two sides of a coin. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 20, 19-36.

Hart, B. and Risley, T.R. (1995). *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-based Assessment of Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Pressley, M. and Symons, S. (1995). Reading comprehension strategies. In M. Pressley and V. Woloshyn (eds.). *Cognitive Strategy Instruction That Really Improves Children's Academic Performance* (2nd edition). Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

Snow, Catherine, Burns, Susan, and Griffin, Peg (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. National Research Council. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Snow, Catherine, Burns, Susan, and Griffin, Peg (1999). *Starting Out Right*. National Research Council. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Tunmer, W.E., Herriman, M.L. and Nesdale, A.R. (1988). Metalinguistic abilities and beginning reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23, 134-158.

Whitehurst, G.J., Falco, F.L., Lonigan, C., Fischel, J.E., DeBaryshe, B.D., Valdez-Menchaca, M.C. and Caulfield, M. (1988). Accelerating language development through picture book reading. *Developmental Psychology*, 24, 552-588.

"Teachers have told me that being a really good Breakthrough teacher is one of the most challenging things they have ever done. But, they say, it is absolutely the most rewarding."

—Linda Nolan, Director of Instructional Services, School City of East Chicago, East Chicago, Indiana

NABSE
2001-2002 Partnership Demonstration Sites

Harrisburg City School District
Steele School

School District of Philadelphia
Robert Fulton Elementary

Prince George's County School District
Glassmanor Elementary School

Lawrence Public Schools
Lawrence Comprehensive Early Childhood Center

New Haven Public Schools
Barnard Academic Academy

Norfolk Public Schools
Chesterfield Academy of Math, Science, and Technology

Cary Community School District
Alain L. Locke Elementary

Bronx School District 8
PS 138 Samuel Randall Elementary

Breakthrough to Literacy®

Partners for Results

2662 Crosspark Road
Coralville, Iowa 52241
Toll-free (800) 874-2851
Local (319) 665-3000
Fax (319) 665-3014
www.earlyliteracy.com

For additional information, contact:
Charlotte K. Frank, Ph.D.
Vice President, Research and Development
McGraw-Hill Education
The McGraw-Hill Companies
1221 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020
Telephone: 212-512-6512
Fax: 212-512-4769
cfrank@mcgraw-hill.com
www.mheducation.com

McGraw Hill Education

NAESP
National Association of Elementary School Principals
www.naesp.org

NABSE
National Alliance of Black School Educators
www.nabse.org

...ERIC Submissions - Reproduction Release Form

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
Reproduction Release (Specific Document)

ERIC

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Results: Sharing Responsibility for Results, Breakthroughs into Literacy	
Author(s):	
Corporate Source: McGraw-Hill Education - The McGraw-Hill Cos.	Publication Date: 5/02

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign in the indicated space following.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
Level 1	Level 2A	Level 2B
☒	☐	☐
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) and paper copy	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: Charlotte K. Frank, Ph.D	Printed Name/Position/Title: Vice Pres., Research + Development	
Organization/Address: The McGraw-Hill Companies 1221 Ave. of Americas N.Y., NY 10020	Telephone: 212-512-6512	Fax: 212-512-4769
	E-Mail Address: cfrank@mcgraw-hill.com	Date: 7/11/02

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor: Charlotte K. Frank - The McGraw-Hill Cos.

http://eric.indiana.edu/www/submit/release.shtml

07/11/02 11:52 212 512 4769 MCGRAW HILL 02/03 NO:485

Address:	1221 Ave. of Americas N.Y, NY 10020
Price:	—

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:	—
Address:	—

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication (ERIC/REC).

ERIC/REC Clearinghouse | 2805 E 10th St Suite 140 | Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
Telephone: 812-855-5847 | Toll Free: 800-759-4723 | FAX: 812-856-5512
e-mail: ericcs@indiana.edu | WWW: http://eric.indiana.edu
EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)

07/11/02 11:52 03/03 NO:485 212 512 4769 MCGRAW HILL